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Science Stages a Comeback

If a tree is planted with its roots severed, it will look as green as any other plant to start with, but, on the very next day, its leaves will start drying up, and will go on drying up, for very soon the tree will die. This is exactly what has happened to atheism and disbelief in religion. In the beginning it looked as if atheism was flourishing, religion had become a thing of the past and the world had entered an age of irreligion. But this was a short-lived phenomenon, principally because it was rootless. And now religion has bounced back with renewed vigour.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a strong wave of what was popularly called scientific atheism. But new scientific investigations carried out at the beginning of the 20th century started turning the tide against its credibility. At the beginning of the 20th century Sir James Jeans declared that the universe which had been discovered by modern Science was not compatible with mechanical interpretations. And now that we are nearing the end of the 20th century, there is an increasing number of theoretical physicists whose explanation of the world makes the existence of God imperative. Without His Being, no explanation of the world is possible.

In a 200-page book, published in 1988, entitled *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen W. Hawking (one of the foremost physicists of the modern age) explains the Big Bang Theory, according to which the universe is constantly expanding at a fixed speed. After working out the relevant mathematical equations, Hawking has reached the conclusion that the expansion of the universe is taking place according to a well calculated scheme.

The initial rate of expansion must have been fixed with great accuracy so that it would always be less than the critical rate, i.e. the rate at which the universe would begin to recollapse. If the 'big bang' model is correct, and time started from this point, the initial condition of the universe would have exploded and come to an end a very long time ago. This view cannot be explained unless it is accepted that the rate of expansion of the universe has been determined with the utmost pre-science. Stephen Hawking writes:

It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us. (p. 134).

One of the most amazing qualities of the universe is that no interpretation of it, other than that which accepts God's existence, can explain it, despite the best brains in every age having attempted to unravel its mysteries.

It has been claimed that the universe has always been in existence in its present form. It has also been claimed that it came into being on its own and that it goes on its own. Cause and effect have been said

to have created everything, and attempts have also been made to prove the law of evolution to be the creator of the universe.

But all this has been disproved by the knowledge man has acquired. The more a man learns about the universe, the more absurd do these theories appear to him; the more strange does it seem that something, or someone other than God Almighty should be the Lord and Master of the Universe.

The universe, by its very existence, testifies to the fact that God is its Creator. To say that something, or someone else, is Master of the universe is to make a claim which is utterly without foundation. Whatever arguments or opposing opinions have been expressed to propagate this theory have been proved erroneous by the knowledge acquired to date through human research.

Trusting in God, not wealth

During the Caliphate of Umar, some revenue arrived from Iraq. Umar began to distribute it, and appeared to be on the point of exhausting it completely when Abd ar Rahman ibn Auf suggested to Umar that he should keep some of it back in order to deal with any enemy attack or calamity that might befall them. At this, Umar was indignant. "Be done with you; you play the devil's advocate. No, by God, for the sake of tomorrow, I will not disobey God today."

The Power of Unity

Tycho Brahe, the Danish astronomer, was born in Knudstrup in 1546 and died in 1601 in Prague. He was a contemporary of the German astronomer, Johannes Kepler, who was born near Wurtemberg in 1571 and died there in 1630. Although both these men were seriously engaged in astronomical research, neither of them on his own could make any headway.

Their research was hindered by one common factor – neither of them had a complete mastery over all aspects of astronomy. Tycho Brahe had done extensive observation work, which he meticulously recorded until he had a huge collection of data. But a prerequisite for success in astronomical studies is a knowledge of arithmetic. And that was the very point on which Tycho Brahe was weakest. He was thus unable to relate in mathematical terms what he had observed in the heavens.

On the other hand, Kepler was no expert in the observation of the universe. Although the telescope was already in existence, he was never able to use it to advantage, so that the sum total of his observation work was negligible. His speciality was the field of arithmetic. His mathematical deductions regarding the universe were, therefore, of great value.

Tycho Brahe, however, had serious differences with Kepler, the latter having upbraided him in a letter for being a hypocrite. He nevertheless showed great magnanimity towards Kepler, managing to keep his temper with him, although irascible by nature himself. This was because he was convinced in the end that the best person to inherit his acquired knowledge would be Kepler and no other. He therefore decided to ignore Kepler's invective, and in 1601, he handed over all his valuable research papers to him free of cost.

Once Kepler had acquired all of Tycho Brahe's records of his observations, he was able to make good his own shortcomings. Now he devoted all his mathematical genius to the correlation of Brahe's work. This resulted in the formation of three laws which are known as 'Kepler's laws of Planetary Motion'.
1. The planets move about the sun in ellipses, at one focus of which the sun is situated. 2. The radius vector joining each planet with the sun describes equal areas in equal times. 3. The ratio of the square of the planet's year to the cube of the planet's mean distance from the sun is the same for all planets. It was these laws which paved the way for Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) to discover the force of gravity.

This clearly shows that the secret of success in this world is the pooling of diverse talents and a willingness to cooperate with others. Since everyone has his limitations, it is impossible in most cases to accomplish big things single-handedly. Big achievements become possible when a number of people with different skills come together to strive towards a single objective. There can be no truly great undertakings in this world without collective effort.

But collective effort is only possible when people are prepared to sink their differences. Unity in diversity has to 'be the rule.

Differences of opinion are natural. They will exist in spite of the best intentions. It is hardly possible to avoid them. The only solution to this problem is for people to resolve to come together *despite their differences*. In the larger interests of the people, self-interest must be sacrificed. For the sake of greater issues, the smaller ones must be ignored. Personal aspirations must give way before the achievement of a higher goal.

This calls for real courage and broad-mindedness, without which no great plans can ever be translated into reality.

7 November 1991

A piece of good advice is more precious than a material gift.

According to Iban ibn Salim, it is better if your brother gives you some advice rather than a material gift.
“While wealth might corrupt you, advice will set your feet on the right path”

A Message

Some young Kashmiris asked me recently what my message was for Kashmir. I told them it was the same one that I have been repeating since 1967. It is simply that the solution to their problem lies in accepting the reality, and not in emotional slogans or in the politics of confrontation.

From my study of the Qur'an and Hadith, and my reading of history. I have found that this world is for those who have a grasp of reality and who devote themselves seriously to constructive work. Ignoring the reality and indulging in emotional outbursts will only compound the issue. Little else will be achieved.

When about to embark upon constructive work, one basic essential worth remembering is that action is not synonymous with steps taken under the influence of emotion. Action, in the best sense, means recognizing opportunities and turning them to advantage. This necessarily entails starting with the possible in order to attain what, at first sight, seems the impossible. Starting with the impossible could mean losing even what is possible.

Another important fact is that whatever one achieves in this world is the result of personal worthiness. Nothing is ever achieved just by making demands and causing destruction. Any individual interested in making progress shall have to prove his capability through peaceful, constructive efforts. Only then will the desired goal be reached. The same is true of community. In this world nothing is eternal – neither losing nor winning.

Here, if one feels deprived, it is more often than not a case of self-deprivation. Such a situation, and the feelings of resentment arising there from, are often self-inflicted. The same is true of deceit. If one is deceived, it is very likely through one's own foolishness. Failure is the result of unworthiness and ineptitude. Success is the result of having forged ahead and proved one's capability.

The correct steps to take in this world are those which allow you to proceed gradually, day by day. Steps which lead you in the reverse direction are no steps at all. They can, in fact, be suicidal leaps.

Oblivious of God

If you happen to talk to someone about his son, he will have innumerable things to say about him. But when you speak to the same person about God he will remain unmoved, as if he had nothing to say about the Almighty. As if he knows nothing of God.

Just remind someone of a revered ancestor of his, and you will find him talking with great zest as if this cherished memory had stimulated his innermost feelings. Mention God to the same person and you will find him apathetic, bereft of all feeling, as if he knew nothing of what to say about God.

Talk to someone about his leader (akabir) and you will at once be given the benefit of all kinds of emotional outpourings. He will not stop until you interrupt to change the topic. Mention God to the same person, and you will find him impassive, not in the least excited, as if he lacked the vocabulary to speak about God.

Mention the name of a community's hero to a member of that community and he is immediately found to have at his disposal the choicest of expressions to describe him. Mention God to the same person and you will see that he remains unaffected. God's name creates no stirrings within his soul, such as should come gushing out spontaneously.

How sad it is to think that people have a great deal to say about human beings, but are at a loss for words when it comes to the subject of God. They are a veritable storehouse of encyclopaedic knowledge about men, but seem to be empty and uninformed where God is concerned. Could it be that the springs of faith have dried up within their hearts?

Have people not experienced that greatness of God which they could relate to other people? Have people witnessed no miracles of God? Are they aware only of the creatures, while remaining blissfully unaware of the Creator?

Tolerance: The Way of Nature

Tolerance is one of nature's universal principles. Without it, how could two such mighty beasts as the tiger and the elephant live side by side in the same jungle? It has been observed that when an elephant and a tiger cross each other's path, they quietly go their separate ways without showing any animosity. If, as a general rule, elephants and tigers did not display this mutual tolerance, every chance meeting would mean a fight to the finish.

Just as nature has taught the elephant and the tiger to follow this principle of avoidance, so also has it endowed the human system with what is known in medical parlance as 'biological tolerance' "(Tolerance) in biology (is) the ability of an organism to endure contact with a substance, or its introduction into the body, without ill effect." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, X/31)

This ability of the body to accept foreign elements is the bedrock of our entire system of medical treatment. Medicines administered during illness can be very harmful to the body as a whole. But the body accepts them, despite its susceptibilities, when correctly prescribed. It is thanks to the 'tolerance' of the body that medicine can enter it and effectively heal a diseased organ without there being any harmful side effects to other organs.

It is imperative that there should be the same show of tolerance in human society too. What the jungle beasts do as a matter of instinct and the human body does under nature's compulsion should be performed by man in the full consciousness of its moral necessity. If an individual is to live peaceably with his fellow men, he must follow the path of tolerance as a matter of deliberate policy.

When people live together, there are bound to be differences, friction, complaints. This will happen in any family, society and country and, at the international level, such problems are often much more acute. But regardless of the level of contact, in any human interaction, there will always be unpleasant situations.

What is the remedy? The best answer is tolerance, on an individual as well as on a collective basis. That is the only practical method of living together if there is to be peace and progress. Without the spirit of tolerance, there can be no uplift or progress of the human race.

We should not make the mistake, however, of regarding tolerance as a state of passivity. It is rather a realistic approach engendered by a positive state of mind. It certainly does not mean opting for an inferior choice under duress when a better choice was possible. The truth is that there is no alternative to tolerance: it is a practical necessity and not a social weakness.

It frequently happens that when a man is faced with an unpleasant situation, his first impulse is to fight it out in the full belief that his struggle will remedy matters. But once he has imposed his will in this way on

the situation, and it has been suitably adjusted in terms of his requirements, he sooner or later realizes that the new state of affairs has aspects which are as bad as if not worse than the original situation, which – since he had no sense of tolerance – immediately drove him into an ugly confrontation.

The policy of tolerance gives us the time and opportunity to make correct decisions about what course of action to follow. It makes it possible for us to adjust to adverse circumstances and to seek out new avenues by which to reach our goals. If, on the contrary, we reject tolerance as a correct attitude, and regard every untoward look, word or deed as a personal affront, we shall ultimately dismiss all human behaviour towards ourselves as 'evil'. This 'evil' will really be of our own making, and if we finally become engulfed in it, we shall only have our own ill-judged attitude to thank for it.

If an elephant and a tiger did not tolerate each other, they would be inviting their own deaths. The very fact that they do tolerate each other gives them a new lease of life. One of the greatest advantages of tolerance is that it gives one freedom of action and the opportunity to shape one's life in a positive way. True success in life flows from the full utilization of this opportunity to act. Any denial of this opportunity, through intolerance, can bring only destruction in its wake.

Criticism

Why do people react so strongly to criticism? The reason is that criticism is taken as an insult. If they were to take criticism as a mere difference of opinion, their reaction would be less violent.

The strongest feeling in a man is the desire for respect. Under no circumstances would a man like to be insulted. When he encounters a critical attitude in others, he feels as though his honour and self-respect were under attack. This is why he is enraged by criticism and reacts strongly to his critics.

Criticism is, indeed, the bitterest pill for a man to swallow. And there is no difference in the reaction of the common man and the elite when it comes to this. There are only two types of men who can keep their balance when under critical fire.

The first is the one who fears God, and who has such a profound understanding of His glory, that his own existence has no value in comparison. By accepting the greatness of God, he accepts his inferior station. Such a mental frame prevents him from reacting strongly to criticism. If the criticism is meant to belittle him, it does not matter to him, as he has already accepted his humble position.

The other type of man who does not react to criticism is the one with a scientific temperament. Science being the study of external reality, the scientist believes that reality is what manifests itself outwardly and not what exists in his own mind. The Scientific temperament negates self-importance in a man and makes him a realist. It helps the Scientist take a detached view of what is said by way of criticism. His attention becomes focussed on the truth of the matter and not on hurtful comments.

A strong reaction to criticism only proves that a man is devoid of piety and has no true academic leanings. If such a man is criticised, he presumably deserves it.

Hereafter, Not Politics

Just after Maulana Asad Madani, President of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, had returned from a tour of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, a meeting was held in the Masjid Abul Nabi, New Delhi, on September 27, 1972.

When a member of the gathering asked the Maulana what Muslims should do in the prevailing situation, he replied, "Muslims will never achieve anything so long as they remain deeply concerned about politics. It is a wrong interpretation of Islam to believe that the prophets came to establish political order in the world. In fact, their priority was the life hereafter.

They used to instill Divine fear in people. They were like a father who tries to pull away a young son who is about to fall in the raging fire. In this matter the Muslim League has caused the maximum damage. The move to partition the country created so much hatred; it created such a gulf between the two communities, that whatever we say now, it is not taken in the correct light. Prejudice begets further prejudice. It creates a dead end. I have heard Maulana Syed Hussain Ahmed Madani say that the Masjid in Calcutta, known as the Nakhuda Masjid before partition, used to witness about 100 persons convening to Islam everyday. (Maulana Madani was Khatib in the Masjid before Partition). The same was true of the rest of the country. Daily hundreds of people were entering the fold of Islam. All this ended as a result of the policy of hatred of Partition. (*Al Jamiat Weekly*, Delhi March 24, 1973, p. 3).

Muslims today are committing the same blunder. Whatever the cost, they must revive the kind of atmosphere that existed prior to partition in order that they engage in *da'wah* work. If they fail to do so, it is almost certain, that they will be held accountable by God, and there will be nothing then that will save them.

The Root of Evil

When everyone speaks of truth, why is it that perversion has set in all over the world? The reason for this, according to the Quran, is deviation, that is, turning from right to wrong.

One form this deviation has taken in the world of today is the interpretation of commands meant for individuals as if they were meant for people in general. That is, those commands which are addressed specifically to individuals for self-action are taken as being applicable not to the self but to others. For instance, the Qur'an says: "Magnify your Lord, cleanse your garments and keep away from all pollution." (74). If this verse is taken to mean: "Cleanse the garments (behaviour) of others," then the injunction will have entirely the wrong effect. This verse, which aims at improving personal behaviour will, if wrongly interpreted, lead us into launching campaigns against others.

The same is true of other commands. Whatever the expression of the divine will, it is addressed first and foremost to the individual. But the revolutionary clerics of modern times have diverted the focus of all commands from the individual to the community. This is why, in spite of vigorous action being taken in the name of religion, no improvement of character is in sight.

All kinds of reforms and all kinds of perversions can be summed up in just two short sentences:

1. God is great, so I am not great.
2. God is great, so you are not great.

The first sentence takes the meaning of Allahu Akbar in the right sense. But not the second, which is a misrepresentation of Islamic thinking. If you repeat the sentence, 'God is great therefore, I am not great,' this will engender a feeling of responsibility within you, and pride will give way to seriousness and a desire for personal improvement. Humility, which is the root of all good, will then override all other feelings.

On the contrary, if you repeat the second sentence, i.e. 'God is great, therefore, you are not great; this will beget a psychology of pride which will lead to violent activism and the politics of destruction. It will mean unlimited chaos and perversion in the name of Islam.

Islam and the Challenges of the World

Man has been facing a number of challenges – intellectual, political, economic, etc.–which are universal in the modern world. A major issue is whether man can continue to live in peace on this planet. This is matter of crucial importance because man's very existence is in peril. It is the future of mankind which is at stake.

Various sets of adverse circumstances have together produced a state of unrest throughout the entire world. At different places groups of people are engaged in violent clashes with other groups. This state of affairs is such as to render our scientific progress meaningless, and it must be acknowledged that our very civilization is in jeopardy.

Unfortunately, in this baneful sequence of events, the name of Islam has come to be linked with violence. Thanks to the foolish and imprudent acts of certain Muslims, coupled with the propaganda campaign launched by Islam's antagonists, Islam and violence have come to be regarded as interchangeable terms.

One of my acquaintances, who lives in Europe, told me in the course of a conversation, that he had once been called for an interview by some company there. The interview started like this: "Are you a Muslim?" "Yes". "Then you are a terrorist."

As you can imagine, the interview could hardly proceed beyond this point.

But the truth about Islam is the very opposite. The word Islam itself means peace, having been derived from the Arabic root *silim* meaning peace. And the Prophet of Islam is described in the scriptures as a "mercy to the world." The Qur'an has this to say: "And God calls you to the home of peace; the lesson that is imparted through Hajj, a course of training for a Muslim for the whole of his life, is not to harm a single human being, not even an animal." To call such a religion one of violence is therefore highly inappropriate.

This paper was presented by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan at the peace conference, "Religions for a Sea of Peace" held at Malta, 8-10 October, 1991.

Islam came to mankind in an age when violence was an integral part of every nation's culture and, as such, was prevalent all over the world. Violence, it was thought, was the most dependable means for the achievement of all ends.

It was at this point in time that Islam brought to the world the message of peaceful co-existence, not only in theory, but also in practice. The truth is that Islam is a peaceful way of life: it was so for the man of the past, and it is so for the man of today.

But mere casual talk about peace is not going, of itself, to produce peace for mankind. It is essential rather to formulate a concept of peace in such a manner as to explain and underline its importance. Furthermore, such a concept must be accompanied by a methodology which will facilitate its practical realization.

Simplifying One's Difficulties

The concept presented by Islam of peaceful living was based on the idea that, in this world, adversity is always accompanied by some positive, simplifying factor. That is to say that disadvantages will always be accompanied by advantages. The common man is nevertheless of the view that whenever any difficulty presents itself, the only solution is to fight. And it is this mentality which breeds violence. If, however, he could be convinced that whenever the path to success seemed barred to him, there would always be something inherent in the situation to ease his difficulties, his whole manner of thinking would change.

This is not a concept which is immediately acceptable, the main reason being that most people have never formed the habit of identifying the positive factors in a seemingly negative situation. But once this concept has taken root in a man's mind, he will no longer clash, head-on, with anything unfavourable that comes in his way. He will, on the contrary, direct his efforts towards seeking whatever advantages lie in store for him. Then, only after securing these advantages will he start his struggle anew. In this way, on the ideological plane, this concept strikes at the very roots of violence. In addition to this conceptual approach, Islam offers a new methodology based on non-violence rather, than on violence. Here I should like, very briefly, to deal with this topic.

Willingness to Accept the Possible

The first principle of the non-violent method is to show willingness to accept what is possible. A fine, practical example of this principle was personally demonstrated by the Prophet of Islam at the outset of his missionary career in Mecca. At that time, in Mecca, the most sacred house of worship, the Kaaba, housed 360 idols. The ritual of Hajj had been distorted. For instance, the solar instead of the lunar calendar was being used for its observance. Drinking and other evils were rife.

Had the Prophet of Islam directly launched a *jihad* against these evils, he would at once have set off a violent confrontation in Mecca, and the armed conflict would have overshadowed his message of peace.

The Prophet had, at that juncture, formulated an important principle of peace. Presenting it to the world, he put it into practice himself. The principle he followed was to make one's starting point centre on what was possible. That is to say, to confine one's activity to the field in which opportunities are available under the prevailing system. The rest had to be left for the future.

This was the principle which he followed for thirteen years while working in Mecca. Any attempt to bring about a change in the system in Mecca would only have resulted in clash and confrontation. He,

therefore, set before himself the target of bringing about a change in the individual, and continued to work on those same lines for the whole of the Meccan period.

Moving Away from the Point of Confrontation

Another principle formed by the Prophet in this regard was to move away from the point of conflict. This principle took practical shape in the Hijrah (emigration). It was in adherence to this principle that the Prophet emigrated to Medina, leaving his hometown, Mecca, in the thirteenth year of his prophethood.

Hijrah literally means 'to leave'. It means that if the other party comes to the point of aggression in order to stop whatever peaceful work is being undertaken, then one must move away from that place rather than take to fighting.

Indeed, Hijrah is just one of the strategies employed to avoid confrontation, but if it proves the best method, it must be resorted to, even if it entails leaving one's homeland, property and relatives.

The Hdaybiyyah Principle

When the Prophet of Islam emigrated to Medina, he did not launch any military campaign from there. His adversaries, the Quraysh, however, made military preparations and launched an onslaught without any provocation from the other side. It was due to this aggression that some defensive battles had to be fought. At this juncture, in order to avoid further bloodshed, the Prophet followed an excellent principle which can be termed the Hdaybiyyah principle.

What the Prophet of Islam did with regard to the Hdaybiyyah treaty was to accept all the demands of the other party in return for their agreeing to his demand that no battle be fought between them, directly or indirectly, for a period of ten years. The Hdaybiyyah treaty was, in fact a no-war pact. The Hdaybiyyah principle can thus be summed up in these words: unilateral acceptance of all the demands of the opposite party in order to obviate any risks of further clash and confrontation.

The Demonstration Rather Than the Use of Force

In spite of this no-war pact, the Prophet's opponents reopened hostilities – thus committing a breach of their agreement. This time the Prophet adopted a different strategy, with the result that Mecca was ultimately conquered. Very few lives were lost, however, for, beyond minor skirmishes, no armed struggle between the opposing forces took place.

The superior strategy employed on the occasion of the conquest of Mecca was, quite simply, to achieve one's end, *not by the use of force, but by the demonstration of strength.*

Refraining from Vengeance

The initial strategy adopted by the Prophet after the conquest of Mecca was one of remarkable leniency. After the victory, men who had been his deadliest enemies were now brought before him. Today, we would call them war criminals of the worst kind. The only possible fate for such criminals in those days was summary execution. But the Prophet granted them all an unconditional amnesty.

The greatest advantage of this general amnesty was that the country was spared a counter-revolution and all the bloodshed that would have ensued. Had the Prophet punished these men, the fire of counter-revenge would most certainly have been ignited in the tribes all over Arabia. The shedding of Arab blood would then have reached a new peak.

Rising Above the Psychology of Reaction

If a peaceful atmosphere is to be maintained in society while one goes about achieving one's ends, albeit in a peaceable manner, a great sacrifice is required. That is why he himself could set such a perfect example for the building of the life of the nation on the basis of non-violence.

One example of such a sacrifice can be seen in the Battle of Badr. In this battle, 70 Meccans had been taken as prisoners of war. All of them belonged to the nobility of Mecca and all were well educated by the standards of the time. Considering that in Medina, where the Prophet was staying, the people lacked such an education, the Prophet did not order the execution of the Meccans, but instead set a 'ransom' for each of them. That is, each one had to teach ten children of the Ansar (Medinan inhabitants) how to read and write. After that they were to be set free.

At that time, one great risk was involved in setting these prisoners of war free. They being leaders of hostile tribes, there was the genuine fear that, once back in Mecca, they would use their freedom to incite the citizenry to prepare for another war. This fear became a reality when they succeeded in provoking their fellow-Meccans to fight the Battle of Uhud.

Fully aware of the risk involved, the Prophet had, nevertheless, set these Meccans free. This instance not only demonstrates his love of peace, but also underlines the importance he attached to education. He felt that its importance was so great that it had to be acquired – even at the risk of a future war.

Conclusion

These few points, though in brief, show that Islam has a great role to play in countering the deadly challenges, namely violence and conflict, which are faced by the world of today. I would add that this scheme of Islam is not based on mere ideology, but has a genuine history of practical success to back it. The history of Islam shows that its message of peace is not just a dream of utopia, but is a fully practicable programme. It is a historical fact that the Prophet of Islam adopted such a well-considered

strategy that all his successes were achieved with surprisingly little bloodshed. The toll of casualties in the revolution he brought about in Arabia amounted to only about a thousand on both sides. This number is comparatively so low that this revolution can rightly be termed bloodless.

Islam, in short, is the Spence of strife-free living, supported by a factual history of peaceful co-existence.

20 November 1991

Muslims should be dearer to each other than money.

Abdullah ibn Umar is reported to have said: "There was a time when not one of us would have set his dirhams and dinars above his Muslim brothers. Now, a time has come when we put our dirhams and dinars first and our Muslim brothers second."

(Al-Tabarani)

Spending for the cause of Islam in times of distress

When Abu Bakr first became a Muslim, he possessed forty thousand dirhams, all of which wealth he devoted to the cause of Islam. At that time Islam was going through a difficult period. For this reason the Prophet said: "No one's wealth has benefitted me so much as Abu Bakr's." (As related by Hesham ibn Urwah who heard this from his father.)

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Thrift, even in the midst of plenty.

The Prophet once passed by Saad while the latter was pouring water over himself from a large vessel to perform his ablution. "What is this extravagance, O Saad?" said the Prophet. "Prophet of God, said Saad, "Can there be extravagance even in one's ablutions?" "Yes indeed, replied the Prophet, "even if you are standing on the banks of a river."

(Ahmad)

The Principle of Two Witnesses

Haji Imdadullah (1817-1899) was a pious man of Deoband. Whenever someone spoke ill of a person, he would say: Bring two witnesses, and when the complainant failed to produce the two witnesses, he would dismiss the matter there and then. He would say “Your version is unreliable without its confirmation by two witnesses.”

This is exactly what the shariah advocates. Islam insists upon the principle of witnesses to establish proof. When a man has dealings with another, or makes a claim, it is incumbent upon him to produce reliable witnesses. In all other matters two witnesses are mandatory, with the exception of adultery, in which four witnesses are necessary.

When a man apportions blame to someone, the Islamic rule demands that he produces witnesses. Without the necessary evidence, his claim would be considered baseless.

However, because of the decline in the moral standards of today, this principle has largely been allowed to fall into abeyance. Evidence is hardly ever considered necessary, particularly in the case of soured relations, or long-standing grievances against others. However wild the allegations, they are accepted as truth. No one cares to demand two witnesses, and no one cares to produce them.

This malady is rampant, sparing neither the ordinary run of people nor the most senior religious leaders. I have not come across a single person, or even heard of anyone in my own lifetime who would demand two witnesses when his opponent is being blamed for something, or who would refuse to believe representations, which could easily be false, without the proper evidence.

In the past, what the word ‘piety’ connoted is evidenced in the incident quoted above. But now its meaning has completely changed. Today a man believes an allegation, without any evidence or witnesses, and his ‘piety’ remains intact. Despite this, he continues to be revered by his followers.

The Result, of Reaction

Mr. G.D. Birla (1894-1983), besides being the topmost industrialist in the country, was also a very close associate of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle.

How the idea of National freedom took shape in the mind of Mr. Birla, is reproduced here in his own words: "When I was 16 years old, I started my independent business as a broker in Calcutta. During this period, I came in contact with many Englishmen; who were either my customers or my superior officers. I also saw their organisational capability and other qualities. But one thing I could not bear was their racial pride. I was not permitted to use the elevator to reach their offices. Neither was I allowed to sit on their benches, while waiting. This humiliation was very painful. As a result of this, I got interested in politics, which started in 1912 and continues till today."

The editor of *The Hindustan Times* (12 Jun. 1983) comments on this event:

"This was the beginning of his nationalism." Mr. Birla's nationalism was inspired by intense feelings of dislike. Similarly the Islamism of the present-day Muslim leaders is born out of hatred for an opponent or enemy, whether real or imaginary. Both these sentiments are the results of reactionary forces, even though they speak in different languages. Neither of them could be termed as a positive case.

To act on the strength of a positive incentive is one thing. But to be spurred on by a negative incentive is quite another thing. The former is 'action', the latter 'reaction'. A satisfactory result can flow only from right action. Reaction being negative in itself, no positive result can be expected from it.

Islam: Creator of the Modern Age
Journey Towards Progress

There were four centres of civilization before the advent of Christ – Persia, China, India and Greece. After the advent of the Prophet of Islam, the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mansoor, built Baghdad in 762. He invited religious scholars and intellectuals to come from far and near, and encouraged the rendering of books in various languages into Urdu. This work started under the patronage of the state. In 830 Al-Mamun established in Baghdad his famous *Bayt al Hikmah* (house of wisdom), a combination library, academy and translation bureau and an astronomical observatory: The work of translation continued with such speed and on such a vast scale that, within eighty years after the establishment of Baghdad, most of the books in Greek had already been rendered into Arabic.

During the Abbasid era paper was being manufactured* on a large scale, so there was no dearth of paper for writing books. There were more. than 400,000 books in the library of Cordova (Spain) in the tenth century, whereas in Europe at that time, according to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the library of Canterbury was at the top of the list of Christian libraries for possessing 1800 books in the 13th century.

Al Mamun's astronomers performed one of the most delicate geodetic operations – the measuring of the length of a terrestrial degree. The object was to determine the size of the earth and its circumference on the assumption that the earth was round. The measurement, carried out on the plain of Singar, north of the Euphrates, and near Palmyra, yielded $562\frac{2}{3}$ Arabic miles as the length of a degree of the meridian – a remarkably accurate result, exceeding the real length of the degree at that place by about 2877 feet. This would make the circumference of the earth 20,400 miles and its diameter 6500. Among those who took part in this operation were the sons of Musa ibn Shakir and al-Khwarizmi, whose tables, revised a century and a half later by the Spanish astronomer Maslamah al Majriti and translated into Latin in 1126 by Adelard of Bath, became the bases for other works both in the East and the West.

All these activities were going on in the world of Islam at a time when the whole of Europe believed in the earth being flat. In the 12th century, Al-Idrisi made a map of the world in which he even showed the source of the river Nile, which was not discovered by Europe till the 19th century. Muslims transferred to Europe the concept of the Earth being round and the almost correct concept of the causes of the tide.

Ptolemy, the well-known Greek astronomer of the 2nd century, had presented the earth-centered theory of the solar system, in his famous book, *Almajest*. This concept of Ptolemy dominated the minds of the

people all over the world for about 1500 years, until, in the 16th century, Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler carried out researches which ultimately proved its falsity.

If a wrong concept about the revolution of the earth remained predominant for such a long period of time, it was due to the error of regarding something non-sacred as sacred. The Christians believed that the earth was a sacred sphere being the birthplace of the son of God (Christ). Because of this belief, they found the concept of the earth at the centre around which the whole universe revolved, exactly accorded with their supposed concept. This concept of the earth's sacredness came in the way of Christians making any further investigation. They adhered to this theory until finally the naked reality forced them to reject it.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) says: "According to the old cosmology the Earth was the centre of the universe, man was the highest creature of this Earth, and his salvation was the central event in heaven and on Earth. The discovery that the Earth is only one planet among others that rotate around the sun, and that the sun is only an insignificant star among the innumerable galaxies of the cosmos, has shaken the old understanding of man. If the earth, compared to the huge expanses of the universe, was only a speck of dust in the structure of the macrocosm Newton and others began to explore the question of how man, the dust of dust, could continue to claim the holy privilege that he and his fame were the goal and culmination of God's actions." (4:522)

The Christians held Christ to be a part of the holy trinity and developed the concept that the most important event of history ever to take place on earth was the crucifixion of God's son for the atonement of man's sins. In this way, the earth came to hold a sacred position in their set of beliefs. They offered the most stiff opposition to any such thinking as could undermine the central position of the earth. It was this belief that came in the way of free investigation of the solar system.

In this way, holding the non-sacred to be sacred had locked the doors to all progress. Holding the moon sacred came in the way of nurturing the thought of man setting foot upon it. Holding the river sacred came in the way of man ever planning to produce electricity by conquering the river. Holding the cow sacred came in the way of man gauging the importance of its protein-rich meat and making it a part of his diet. All such research and investigation could start only when natural phenomena could be brought down from their pedestal of sanctity to a level on which man could look at them as normal, everyday things.

Prior to Islam the stars were objects of worship. After the Islamic revolution, for the first time, man built observatories and subjected them to study and research on a large scale. Minerals inside the earth were regarded as sacred, but Muslims, for the first time, discovered the art of chemistry and subjected them to research and investigation. The earth was considered to be a deity. (For instance, it was believed that the sky was a male deity and the earth a female deity.) Muslims for the first time measured it to find out its diameter and circumference. The sea was also an object of worship, but Muslims for the first time

used it extensively as a vast highway. The storms and the wind were held to be mysterious and hence the objects of awe and reverence. Muslims set them to turning their windmills.

Mysterious stories were associated with trees and thus the trees too had become worthy to be worshipped. Muslims started investigating them and they thus succeeded in enriching Dioscorides' Herbal by 2000 species.

The rivers too were held to be sacred and therefore alive. Boys and girls were therefore sacrificed to them in order to please these deities. Muslims however used the same rivers for irrigation by making canals, and thus ushered in a new age of agriculture.

In those days Muslims were so ahead of other nations that when they were extradited from Spain, the astrolabes they left behind, by means of which they had studied heavenly bodies, were turned into the clock tower of a church, as the Christians did not understand their use.

It is a fact that in ancient time polytheism and superstition held sway all over the world. And it is also true that it was this polytheism and superstition which were obstacles to all kinds of progress. The revolution based on monotheism which was brought about in the wake of Islam practically ended polytheism and superstition for the first time in history. Afterwards, as a natural result, human history took to the path of progress.

In ancient times creative minds were born in certain countries. They could think independently of their environment. But due to the unfavourable atmosphere and hostile environment of the times their efforts could not be brought to fruition. The buds of their knowledge withered away before they could flower. However, when the Islamic revolution produced a favourable atmosphere, it unleashed a mighty flood of knowledge which had been kept pent up for thousands of years by the dam of superstition.

Considering a man inferior on account of his calling is a mark of ignorance.

Abu Jabal was in command of the Qurayshite forces that faced the Muslims on the field of Badr, when, two young brother, Muawidh and Muadh resolved to slay him. Throwing themselves in the enemy ranks, at the immense danger to themselves, they found Abu Jahal and killed him. As he lay dying, (according to Abdullah ibn Masud) he learned that it was men from Medina who had struck him down. With his dying breath, he gasped out these words: "If only it had been some other who had slain me!" The people of Medina were mostly farmers and it was on this account that Abu Jahal felt scornful of them.